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THE SIMPLICITY OF WAR

BY VERNON KELLOGG

THE longer we have peace the more enviable seems war—in some ways.

War has its drawbacks: men get killed, women and children starve; everybody pays, even those who get paid.

But war has its advantages also. It seems to clear our minds, making us able to see straight forward. It seems to strengthen our wills and our courage, making us able to move straight forward. It makes things simpler even if it makes them bigger. We are able to do things in war-time; we seem unable to do things when peace comes. We seem unable to see straight, think straight, act straight.

Really my title should be the “complexity of peace.” That is what I am thinking of when I say the “simplicity of war.” War, which is supposed to bring complexity, brought us to simplicity and directness of thought and action. Peace, which should bring simplicity, has brought us to a perfect maze of complexity. But we can’t afford to have war all the time for the sake of enabling us to think and act simply and directly. It is absolutely necessary to pull ourselves together and learn to make peace the blessing it is supposed to be, instead of the curse it has been ever since November 11, 1918.

How splendidly we triumphed over the weak and worst parts of us during the war, and behaved as the best parts of us dictated! For nation, for country, for people, for ideals, and not for ourselves, or our party, or our vanity: that is how we were guided in our struggles in war. How are we guided and how are we behaving in our struggles in peace? We are ashamed to answer honestly. We hardly dare to sit down to a cool analysis and appraisal of our behavior in peace. By “we” I mean all of us of Europe and America, or what we call the world.

What confusion, what avarice, what littleness, what hesitation, what blindness! Human kind in the persons of its most civilized, most educated peoples is presenting an edifying spectacle to the lowly and barbarous tribes sitting in the benches around the arena. It must sadden even the anthropoids when they reflect that out of their stock have come these human end-products of millions of years of evolutionary effort. The apes must wonder why Mother Nature didn't stop with apes!

Where are the great men to lead us? Where is the single great man anywhere in the world to see clearly for us and tell us what and how to do? Or is it that the emergency is too great for any man or men? I suppose it is really possible for situations to arise in human life which are too great and difficult for human capacity to meet. Many men believe that there are irresistible influences determining human history that are quite beyond human power to modify. If the present appalling situation is the inevitable consequence of the working of such influences, then all there is to do is, in effect, to do nothing. We can only sit as fatalists with folded hands while the storm rages, and hope that when it has passed there will be something tolerable left to live for.

But most of us prefer to make a struggle for life even in the midst of cyclone or earthquake. For those who have this preference it is high time to struggle. For it seems, and seems more clearly every day, that a world cataclysm is impending; is, indeed, already roaring about us. What shall we do?

Let us abandon generalization in our reference to the world trouble and be a little more specific. Let us consider some of the details that have helped to produce the trouble and some of the features which the many-faced trouble now presents.

I shall never forget the anxious faces of the responsible men in Eastern Europe during the days after the Armistice when the wise men of the victorious Great Powers were sitting in Peace Conference in Paris. As the days passed without any formulation of definitions of new nations, or delimitation of boundaries issuing from the guarded chamber where sat the gods on whose knees rested the fate of nations, the faces outside revealed ever growing anxiety. Swift and definiteness of action, based on

clear judgment and wise charity, were what the world was praying for. Those prayers were unanswered.

In the meantime the peoples got out their old maps, read the history of their countries. They studied, from their own angles, ethnography and economics. The fatal will o' the wisp of "self-determination," released with other troubling things from the Pandora box that somebody opened, was having its alluring way with these peoples. They convinced themselves of where the rightful boundaries should be, and began massing, in casual but dangerous way, riflemen and machine guns along these self-determined boundaries. Soon they were shooting at each other across the barbed wire and trenches of these boundaries, because each people saw its neighbors making wrong boundaries. The period of the twenty-three post-Armistice wars began.

Incidentally there were troubles inside as well as along the boundaries. People were starving and freezing. Politicians were playing politics. Agents of Bolshevism were pointing the way out of trouble—by creating more trouble.

But all of these things have happened, and are now irrevocable. During their occurrence, and as part of the cause of it, came the disillusionment of people and leaders with regard to the aims of the victorious Powers sitting in the seat of judgment. Not alone was the Peace Conference too late in acting; it was not reassuring when it did act. And it devised the fatal plebiscite system. Poland found that its boundaries, when they were finally—and much too late—determined by the Peace Conference, consisted almost entirely of trenches and plebiscites. The Allied and Associated Powers told Poland by formal message and ultimatum to stop fighting, but by informal suggestion these Powers, or some of them, incited her to go on fighting. Not all of Poland's present trouble and the trouble she brings to the world is of Poland's making or is Poland's fault. Some of it is.

Austria came out of the Paris conference-room doomed to perpetual mendicancy. Czecho-Slovakia and Jugo-Slavia came out doomed to continuing internal difficulties, Hungary and Greece to continuing external embroilment, and Germany to bear for a full generation a load of debt mathematically calculated to do

everything just short of actually breaking the camel's back. I think she deserved it, although it is hard to see children damned for their fathers' iniquities. But that is not only the law of man, but of Nature.

England came out of that chamber with an increased and enduring empire problem, and France with an enduring military one. Japan came out with a piece of China—bought at the price of national dishonor unless she makes her word good by return of the booty. And, finally, America came out absolutely bewildered. That was more than two years ago. She is still bewildered.

These are some of the complexities that peace has brought us. As we all live together at the same time in the same world, a world knit together by radiograms and cables, and by ocean liners and railway cars full of mails and passengers and goods, each people's complexities become in some degree the complexities of us all. Added thus together there are enough complexities to fill our eyes and ears and brains to the exclusion of all comfort and leisure and peace of mind. We have peace in that we are no longer—at least, all of us—at war, but we have no peace of mind or soul.

Now in this disturbing, and even terrifying, situation the United States finds itself in a very special position, involving a special opportunity, and because of it, if for no other reason, a special responsibility. We can apparently do more than any other country to bring about some amelioration of the situation. Hence we ought to do it.

We are not bankrupt: some, if not most, of the other nations are. We are the heavy creditor of all of them, but we do not actually need prompt, or even any, payment of their debts to us in order to carry on with decent comfort. We might enjoy, for a moment, having these debts paid, but it seems highly probable that an attempt at actual payment by our debtors—of course only one or two of them could even make the attempt—might easily make things worse for us by still further postponing the time when Europe can buy from us what we need so much to sell her. I believe it would not require much figuring to show that the losses of our producers mount up so rapidly with every day and week of delay in resuming our world trade—and our

exports are now steadily falling—that a surprisingly short postponement would lose us more than the outright gift to our debtors of the ten billion they owe us. Anyway, ten billion would be a cheap price to pay for some surcease from the present troubles of peace. Besides, it would buy us great merit.

It is hackneyed, but true, to say that the world looks to us for leadership in this matter of bringing some simplicity into this troublous time of peace; some directness, some disinterested activity—I may almost say, some honesty. The people, the little people, of Europe still believe in us. They believed enormously in us during the war; they still have some belief in us left. What is said of us by the tired and cynical statesmen in the European capitals need not worry us. The mass of the European people still have faith, and see their hope, in us.

I shall never forget an experience in 1919 in Slovakia. We were a little group of Americans, a Hoover food mission to Poland, working a difficult way from Paris to Warsaw. We were making that part of our journey which led from Vienna north to Cracow, and were passing through Slovakia. In some way, word had preceded our coming, and each little Slovak station we passed had a few American flags out. But as we neared a larger town, the largest through which we were to pass before reaching the Polish frontier, we could see at the station a perfect riot of bunting and flags, Czecho-Slovakian and American intermingled. And there was a great crowd and a band vigorously playing something familiar; it sounded much like the *Star Spangled Banner*. And as our train slowed down before the cheering crowd we saw a central group of long-coated, top-hatted gentlemen. It looked distressingly like a reception.

Now, a reception in Slovakia seemed to contain prospects of embarrassment. For we were a relief mission to Poland, not to Slovakia, and Poland and Czecho-Slovakia were already warmly debating with each other, to the point of rifle and machine gun fire, over the Teschen coal mines. So I told our interpreter to hurry off and explain things briefly and to get the train moving as quickly as possible. But he soon got aboard again, accompanied by one of the top-hatted group, the mayor of the town, who insisted on saying a few words to me.

I tried to forestall his remarks by rapidly explaining the situation and urging him to call off the performance.

"But," he persisted, "you are the food mission, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said, "we are the food mission. But we are the food mission to *Poland*. We can't do anything for Slovakia."

"But," he still persisted, in broken French, "you are the Americans, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," I said, "we are the Americans all right. But we are going to . . ."

"Never mind," he interrupted, much relieved. "You are the Americans." And he stepped to the glassless car window and waved his hand to the band, which became promptly more violent, and to the crowd, which redoubled its cheering. And the introductions were made and the speeches were spoken, and we were finally sent on our way with good wishes and God's blessings—to arrange for relief for an enemy country! But we were "the Americans"!

That was in 1919. But in 1920 it was the same, and I have every reason to believe that it is the same in 1921. If it is, we are the people whose pronouncement or action in international affairs would be most likely to be accepted as dictated by disinterestedness and philanthropy. Hence they would have a higher sanction than those of any other people. We are, I truly believe, the nation on which depends the initiation of the healing of the present critical world sickness. We are the physician called in the night. The ethics of his profession require the physician to respond. He cannot hesitate. The remedies first needed in this case are stimulants, for the patient is nearly *in extremis*.

These stimulants so sorely needed by Europe are money, credit, generous commercial relations, an attitude of encouragement, an active friendly interest. With these first remedies applied, Europe should be able to call again on her own powers of recuperation, and make a natural recovery. But without these stimulants Europe seems hopeless—not merely parts of Europe, but all of Europe. Political boundaries do not mean much when an epidemic or an earthquake is happening. Across and through these boundaries the nations of Europe have myriad connections, especially, and most importantly, economic con-

nections. Not only that, but these economic threads that tie all Europe together extend also across the Atlantic and tie all Europe to us and us to all Europe. They are perfectly visible, and they are unbreakable. We can never again sit, even if we want to, in splendid isolation; any more than England can. So we would do well to make the best of our "entangling alliances," our economic relations, with the rest of the world.

An interesting feature connected with the need of extending our help to Europe is that this philanthropy is just now probably the most important thing needed for our own salvation—not moral, but business and economic salvation. We are a nation of producers and exporters. But with no foreign outlet for our production, we face great danger to ourselves. This is our present difficulty. With a greatly stimulated production, and yet with high wages, high rates of railway transportation, high taxes, and the need of immediate and high returns for our products, and our foreign outlet blocked by Europe's inability to buy, we have to face the necessity of seeing our farmers in despair, our factories shut down, our railways moving toward bankruptcy, and our roll of unemployed growing day by day.

At the same time, Europe is trying frantically to sell to us. Our producers have sharp competition even for their home market. While the adverse rate of exchange prevents purchase from us, it enables Europe to produce cheaply at home and sell cheaply over here. In addition, the Governments of Europe assist the European producer and exporter to keep busy by various ingenious supporting tactics, and even help their buyers to control, in some measure, the overseas prices of our own exports by concentrating purchases in the hands of Governments or trade combinations.

It is a sad mess, and apparently it is getting more so, largely because of our own indecision and delay in positive action. Why can we not act as we acted in war-time? Decision and action are the special characteristics for which we claim distinction. To decide and do: that is American. Well, let us be American.

VERNON KELLOGG.